

**Smart water-use feedback:
Options, preferences, impacts, and
implications for implementation**

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Certificate of original authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Smart water metering (SW metering) is enabling the water industry to enter into the digital age and to embrace new levels of water usage awareness, data analysis and communication. While implementations have been advancing internationally, less progress has been made in extending the benefits of this data and information to access by householders, including in Australia. This thesis investigates the opportunity for more detailed information and feedback on household water consumption by: (i) conceptualising the different options for the presentation of detailed feedback enabled via SW metering (ii) uncovering householder interests and preferences; (iii) measuring the various impacts of detailed feedback on householders and their consumption of water; and (iv) developing an implementation framework. These issues are investigated in relation to furthering implementations and the contribution of SW metering towards more sustainable urban water management (SUWM).

This empirical research was conducted via two trials in New South Wales, Australia to address the urgent need for improved knowledge and experiences of the issues relating to the provision of detailed water-use feedback via SW metering. The ‘Home Water Update’ (HWU) study provided detailed household water- and end-use feedback via paper-based reports. The ‘My Home Our Water’ (MHOW) study provided consumption feedback according to time of use in near real-time via an online portal. A mixed methods approach was used to analyse the trials using smart water meter data, surveys and interviews.

This research shows that providing more detailed water-use feedback through SW metering generates significant householder interest and produces measurable savings (up to 8% in the HWU (paper) study and 4.2% over the longer term in the MHOW (online) study). Moreover, the wide range of options for detailed feedback enabled by SW metering identified in the research—together with the variety found in householder preferences for and responses to detailed feedback—suggests that greater customisation would further elevate the value of feedback to customers and improve engagement.

The implementation framework developed further provides a detailed overview of the key elements for decision-making for detailed water-use feedback programs, categorised as strategic, practical and evaluative considerations. Overall, the research findings cover a broad range of aspects critical to the design of future trials and large-scale roll-outs of SW metering and detailed feedback and the promotion of use that foster more SUWM. For wider industry adoption of detailed water-use feedback programs enabled via SW metering, the importance of the following is underlined (i) conducting quality, robust research and its implications for

project resources; (ii) facilitating knowledge sharing in order to further the water industry's understanding and experience regarding methods and approaches to feedback provision; (iii) building knowledge on how to address heterogeneity among customers is recommended in order to customise approaches to feedback provision (e.g. via a large scale preferences survey and subsequent experimentation with greater levels of customisation, particularly with robust scaled research trials); and (iv) developing the business case for detailed water-use feedback provision by fully documenting methods and making these available for wider evaluation and industry recommendations and improvements. Further developments in this direction, using the implementation framework, will enable the water industry to work towards large-scale implementation of detailed feedback provision which take more full advantage of the customised options made possible via SW metering and the digital age.

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List of publications

This ‘hybrid’ thesis format is presented as a series of papers (chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6) together with an exegesis comprising introduction and methodology chapters (1 and 2) and implications and conclusions (chapters 7 and 8). The thesis includes the following papers, which are referred to in this thesis by their Roman numerals:

- I. Liu, A., Giurco, D., Mukheibir, P. 2015, 'Motivating metrics for household water-use feedback', *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, vol. 103, pp. 29-46. DOI: 10.1016/j.resconrec.2015.05.008.
- II. Liu, A., Giurco, D., Mukheibir, P. 2016, 'Urban water conservation through customised water and end-use information'. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, vol. 112, pp. 3164-3175. DOI: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.10.002.
- III. Liu, A., Giurco, D., Mukheibir, P., Mohr, S., Watkins, G., White, S. 'Online water-use feedback: household user interest, savings and implications' (Submitted manuscript under review).
- IV. Liu, A., Giurco, D., Mukheibir, P., White, S. (in press), 'Detailed water-use feedback: a review and proposed framework for program implementation', *Utilities Policy*. DOI: 10.1016/j.jup.2016.09.002.

Author's contributions to the papers

Ariane Liu led the development of research ideas, methods, data collection and analysis and wrote the manuscripts and revisions in response to the peer reviewers' comments. The concepts in the papers were discussed with Damien Giurco and Pierre Mukheibir, who also reviewed the manuscripts within their supervisory roles, as well as with Graeme Watkins and Stuart White. The statistical analysis in Paper III was provided by Steve Mohr.

Other publications not included in this thesis

The following journal and conference papers were also produced during the course of the author's doctoral research.

- V. Boyle, T., Giurco, D., Mukheibir, P., Liu, A., Moy, C., White, S., Stewart, R.A. 2013, 'Intelligent metering for urban water: A review', *Water*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 1052-1081.

- VI. Liu, A., Giurco, D., Mukheibir, P., Watkins, G. 2013, 'Smart metering and billing: Information to guide household water consumption', *AWA Water*, vol. 40, no. 5, pp. 73-77;
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- VII. Liu, A., Giurco, D., Mukheibir, P. 2014. 'Online household water portal: User interactions and perceptions of water use', In Proceedings of the 2014 SWGIC, Smart Water Grid International Conference, Book of Abstracts, pp. 102–8, 25-27 November, 2014, Incheon, South Korea. *Awarded a 'Certificate of excellent oral presentation of an excellent paper' in the SWGIC best paper awards.*
- VIII. Liu, A., Giurco, D., Mukheibir, P. 2015, 'Household water-use feedback: moving forwards towards sustainable urban water'. In Proceedings of the International Conference on Sustainable Water Management 2015, 29 November to 3 December, 2015, Murdoch, WA Australia.
- IX. Liu A., Giurco, D., Mukheibir, P. in press, 'Advancing household water-use feedback to inform customer behaviour for sustainable urban water', *Water Science and Technology: Water Supply*. DOI: 10.102166/ws.2016.119.

Table of contents

SMART WATER-USE FEEDBACK: OPTIONS, PREFERENCES, IMPACTS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR

IMPLEMENTATION	i
CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF TABLES	xii
ABBREVIATIONS.....	xiii
GLOSSARY	xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND	1
1.2. OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	9
1.3. PROBLEM DEFINITION AND RESEARCH GAPS	15
1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	16
1.5. RESEARCH APPROACH	18
1.6. THESIS LAYOUT	21
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY	24
2.1. RESEARCH APPROACH, DESIGN AND OVERVIEW	26
2.2. SITUATIONAL CONTEXT	29
2.3. RESEARCH SAMPLES.....	31
2.4. INTERVENTION MEDIUMS AND THEIR DESIGN	32
2.5. RESEARCH DATA (AND LIMITATIONS)	33
2.6. DATA ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL DISCUSSION	40
2.7. ETHICS CONSIDERATIONS	42
CHAPTER 3: MOTIVATING METRICS	43
MOTIVATING METRICS FOR HOUSEHOLD WATER-USE FEEDBACK	46
ABSTRACT	46
3.1. INTRODUCTION.....	47
3.2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	51
3.3. MATERIALS AND METHOD.....	58
3.4. RESULTS.....	61
3.5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	75

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	81
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION TO CHAPTER 3: CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS VERSUS NON-RESPONDENTS	82
CHAPTER 4: HOME WATER UPDATE STUDY — PAPER BASED WATER AND END-USE FEEDBACK	89
URBAN WATER CONSERVATION THROUGH CUSTOMISED WATER AND END-USE INFORMATION	91
ABSTRACT	91
4.1. INTRODUCTION.....	91
4.2. MATERIALS AND METHODS	94
4.3. RESULTS.....	102
4.4. DISCUSSION	110
4.5. CONCLUSIONS	114
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	115
CHAPTER 5: MY HOME OUR WATER — ONLINE PORTAL FEEDBACK STUDY.....	116
CHAPTER PREFACE.....	117
PAPER PREFACE	117
ONLINE WATER-USE FEEDBACK: HOUSEHOLD USER INTEREST, SAVINGS AND IMPLICATIONS	118
ABSTRACT	118
5.1. INTRODUCTION.....	118
5.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....	120
5.3. MATERIAL AND METHODS.....	124
5.4. RESULTS.....	130
5.5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	138
5.6. MY HOME OUR WATER EVALUATION SURVEY RESULTS.....	142
CHAPTER 6: LESSONS LEARNED FOR IMPLEMENTATION	151
DETAILED WATER-USE FEEDBACK: A REVIEW AND PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION.....	153
ABSTRACT	153
6.1. INTRODUCTION.....	154
6.2. METHODS	156
6.3. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR DETAILED WATER-USE FEEDBACK ENABLED VIA SWM.....	160
6.4. CURRENT APPROACHES TO FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS USING THE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK.....	161
6.5. CONCLUSION.....	170
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	170
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION TO CHAPTER 6: RESULTS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS	171
CHAPTER 7: KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS — MOVING FORWARDS.....	175
INTRODUCTION.....	176
7.1. OPTIONS	177

7.2. PREFERENCES FOR DETAILED WATER-USE FEEDBACK	179
7.3. IMPACTS OF DETAILED FEEDBACK VIA SW METERING: IMPLICATIONS	184
7.4. IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH	191
7.5. RESEARCH AGENDA AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK	197
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS.....	199
8.1. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH.....	200
8.2. ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	200
8.3. CONCLUDING REMARK	204
REFERENCES.....	205
APPENDIX	219

List of figures

FIGURE 1 REPRESENTATION OF THE MAIN THESIS TOPICS	17
FIGURE 2 THE AUTHOR’S PHD WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WIDER BODY OF WORK UNDERTAKEN	18
FIGURE 3 OVERARCHING RESEARCH APPROACH	26
FIGURE 4 MAPS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY LOCATIONS IN NSW, AUSTRALIA	30
FIGURE 5 DATAMATIC FIREFLY LOGGER	35
FIGURE 6 OUTPOST WASP LOGGER	36
FIGURE 7 SCREENSHOT OF SMARTMON END-USE WATER CONSUMPTION DATA	41
FIGURE 8 GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT	45
FIGURE 9 RESEARCH FOCUS.....	50
FIGURE 10 FRAMEWORK FOR WATER USE-FEEDBACK VIA SMART WATER METERING AND END-USE ANALYSIS	53
FIGURE 11 EXAMPLE HOME WATER UPDATE – FRONT AND REVERSE SIDES	59
FIGURE 12 HOUSEHOLDER EVALUATIONS OF HWU INFORMATION CONTENT (<i>N</i> =22).	65
FIGURE 13 HOUSEHOLDER EVALUATION OF END-USE METRICS (<i>N</i> =22).....	68
FIGURE 14 MOTIVATION / DEMOTIVATION TO SAVE THROUGH NORMATIVE COMPARISONS (<i>N</i> =20)	73
FIGURE 15 HWU STUDY DESIGN.....	96
FIGURE 16 EXAMPLE OF THE ‘HOME WATER UPDATE’ INTERVENTION MEDIUM – FRONT AND REVERSE SIDES.....	98
FIGURE 17 HISTOGRAMS OF (A) HOUSEHOLD WATER CONSUMPTION PROFILES AND (B) OCCUPANCY RATES FOR THE FINAL INTERVENTION AND CONTROL GROUPS.....	101
FIGURE 18 AWARENESS OF HOUSEHOLD WATER USE PRE- AND POST-INTERVENTION.	104
FIGURE 19 PRE- AND POST-INTERVENTION WINTER CONSUMPTION AT END-USE LEVELS FOR (A) HWU GROUP AND (B) CONTROL GROUP	106
FIGURE 20 PRE- AND POST-INTERVENTION SUMMER CONSUMPTION AT END-USE LEVELS FOR (A) HWU GROUP AND (B) CONTROL GROUP.	108
FIGURE 21 MAPS OF STUDY LOCATIONS IN NSW, AUSTRALIA.....	125
FIGURE 22 MY HOME OUR WATER INTERNET PORTAL – DASHBOARD, MY USAGE, AND WAYS TO SAVE SCREENS	127
FIGURE 23 (A) NUMBER OF PAGE VIEWS BY PAGE; (B) TIME SPENT ON EACH PAGE IN MINUTES.....	131
FIGURE 24 COMPARISON OF SMART METER AND BILLING DATA	133
FIGURE 25 AWARENESS OF HOUSEHOLD WATER-USE PRE AND POST-INTERVENTION.	145
FIGURE 26 HOUSEHOLDER EVALUATION OF THE MHOW PORTAL’S DASHBOARD FEATURES	147
FIGURE 27 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.....	157
FIGURE 28 EXAMPLE OF THE ‘HOME WATER UPDATE’ INTERVENTION MEDIUM – FRONT AND REVERSE SIDES.....	158
FIGURE 29 ‘MY HOME OUR WATER’ ONLINE PORTAL – DASHBOARD, MY USAGE, AND WAYS TO SAVE SCREENS	158
FIGURE 30 PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR DETAILED WATER-USE FEEDBACK PROGRAMS INVOLVING SWM	161
FIGURE 31 TOWARDS THE VISION FOR SMART SUSTAINABLE URBAN WATER	195

List of tables

TABLE 1 APPLICATIONS FOR DATA ENABLED VIA SW METERING	5
TABLE 2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CORRESPONDING CHAPTERS.....	20
TABLE 3 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES, DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH OUTPUTS.....	28
TABLE 4 OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTION VIA THE TWO RESEARCH STUDIES	33
TABLE 5 SURVEY DATA ON HOUSEHOLD WATER-USE FEEDBACK PREFERENCES AND RESPONSES.....	62
TABLE 6 SPEARMAN’S RANK-ORDER CORRELATIONS.	67
TABLE 7 HWU EVALUATION SURVEY RESPONDENTS VERSUS NON-RESPONDENTS: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	85
TABLE 8 HWU EVALUATION SURVEY RESPONDENTS VERSUS NON-RESPONDENTS: ATTITUDINAL VARIABLES	86
TABLE 9 HWU INTERVIEWEES VERSUS NON-INTERVIEWED PARTICIPANTS: ATTITUDINAL VALUES	87
TABLE 10 HWU INTERVIEWEES VS. NON-INTERVIEWED HWU EVALUATION SURVEY RESPONDENTS	88
TABLE 11 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE CONTROL AND INTERVENTION GROUPS PRE- AND POST-INTERVENTION.....	105
TABLE 12 FEATURES OF MY HOME OUR WATER.....	128
TABLE 13 WATER CONSUMPTION SAVINGS RELATIVE TO WHEN HOUSEHOLDS LAST LOGGED IN TO MHOW	136
TABLE 14 REGRESSION RESULTS: SHORT- AND LONG-TERM WATER CONSUMPTION SAVINGS AMONG ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS WHEN LAST LOGIN WAS UP TO 42 DAYS AGO.	137
TABLE 15 DISCUSSION TOPICS AMONG USER AND NON-USER HOUSEHOLDS	143
TABLE 16 RATINGS OF MY USAGE, WAYS TO SAVE AND ALERTS	148
TABLE 17 BARRIERS TO SAVING MORE WATER IN THE HOME	149
TABLE 18 RESEARCH STUDIES/IMPLEMENTATIONS: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS	171
TABLE 19 RESEARCH STUDIES/IMPLEMENTATIONS: STRATEGIC AND EVALUATIVE CONSIDERATIONS.....	173
TABLE 20 RESEARCH STUDIES/IMPLEMENTATIONS: DETAILED OVERVIEW OF INFORMATION CONTENT.	174

Abbreviations

ARC	Australian Research Council
AUD	Australian Dollar
HWU	Home Water Update (paper-based water and end-use feedback reports)
IHD	In-home display
ISF	Institute for Sustainable Futures
L/hh/d	Litres per household per day
MCW	MidCoast Water
MHOW	My Home Our Water (online water-use feedback portal)
SUWM	Sustainable urban water management
SW (metering)	Smart water (metering)

Glossary

End-use feedback	Feedback disaggregated by water-use fixtures, appliances or other uses (e.g. taps, toilet, shower, washing machine, outdoors, leaks)
Near real-time feedback	Feedback provided within 24 hours of consumption taking place
SW metering	Smart water (SW) metering is advanced metering which involves the collection of water consumption data at highly frequent intervals (e.g. of minutes or seconds)
Time of use	Time of water consumption, for example, 07:03 AM
Water-use feedback	Customised information on water consumption